

The Greatest Story Ever Told

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[0 : 0 0] well if we could this morning with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in the book of Genesis and Genesis chapter 37 Genesis chapter 37 and if we read again at verse 1 where we read there Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings in the land of Canaan these are the generations of Jacob Joseph been 17 years old was pasturing the flock with his brothers he was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah his father's wives and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons because he was the son of his old age and he made him a robe of many colors he made him a robe of many colors

God works in mysterious ways God works in mysterious ways you know we're familiar with that phrase especially when something takes place in our lives and we can't explain why because as you know there are things that we we don't have an answer for you know we encounter and we experience sins and sicknesses and sufferings and even sorrows and sometimes we don't know why we don't know how we don't know what for and yet we're always drawn back to that promise in Isaiah 55 which reminds us that his ways are not our ways and his thoughts are not our thoughts God's plans and paths and purposes are often not our plans paths and purposes but you know what we know to be true is that every encounter and experience of sin sickness suffering and sorrow it's all part of God's perfect plan paths and purposes for our lives because he's the one who writes the story he is the author of the story he's the director in the drama we might not understand the storyline we might not foresee all the twists and the turns in the narrative but he's the one who turns the pages we might not even see him on the pages we might not understand what he's doing in the story we might not even know him personally as the author but he's there and he's working it all together for our good and ultimately for his glory God works in mysterious ways and you know it was the hymn writer William Cowper who first penned that phrase it comes from a hymn called light shining out of darkness where William Cowper where William Cowper he wrote God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform he plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm and you know in many ways those words not only sum up the story of our lives they also sum up the story of Joseph's life because the story of Joseph is a story in which God moves in a mysterious way and God's perfect plan path and purpose in the life of Joseph it all took place according to his sovereign and supreme providence it wasn't an accident nothing happened by chance no it was all part of God's perfect plan path and purpose for Joseph and his family and the story of Joseph as you know it's a familiar story

I don't think there's anyone who hasn't heard about Joseph and his coat of many colors the story of Joseph it's not only familiar it's also a favorite because it's a good story and it's a gospel story because as we study the life of Joseph together we'll see that there are so many comparisons between the life of Joseph and the life of Jesus and for that reason I would suggest that the story of Joseph is the greatest story ever told the story of Joseph is the greatest story ever told but it's not only a familiar story and a favorite story the story of Joseph is also a story of family and it's a story of favoritism and it's a story of faithfulness the story of Joseph is a story of family a story of favoritism and a story of faithfulness they are our headings this morning the story of Joseph is a story of family favoritism and faithfulness so first of all the story of Joseph is a story of family a story of family we read in verse 1 that Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings in the land of Canaan these are the generations of Jacob

Joseph being 17 years old was pasturing the flock with his brothers he was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah his father's wives and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his sons because he was the son of his old age and he made him a robe of many colors the story of Joseph is recorded for us in Genesis chapters 37 to 50 and in many ways it forms the conclusion to the book of Genesis and as you know the book of Genesis it's the first book in the Bible and it's a book all about beginnings in fact that's what the word Genesis means it means beginnings because it's in the book of Genesis that we read about the beginning of beginnings we read about the beginning of the world where God created the world in the space of six days and saw that it was all very good we read about the beginning of mankind where God created man in his own image and after his own likeness and he gave us an identity creating us both male and female we also read about the beginning of the Sabbath where God instituted a day of rest for all mankind we read about the beginning of marriage where God instructed Adam to have one wife and remain faithful to her throughout his life and so in the book of beginnings we read all about our beginnings but it also means that we also read about the beginning of sin and sickness and suffering and sorrow we read about the fall of Adam and how his disobedience affected all of his descendants after him and it affected them to the point that only a few generations later only a few chapters into the book of Genesis we see that God destroyed the world with a flood and spared Noah and his family but it was as Noah stepped out of the ark that God asserted and affirmed that there was going to be a new beginning and a new Genesis was going to take place through another family and when we come to Genesis chapter 12 we read that God called Abraham and made a covenant with Abraham and God promised Abraham he said to him

I'm going to give you a family I'm going to make you a family nation and through your family all the nations in the world will experience blessing through your family all the nations in the world will experience blessing but of course God's promise didn't come without its problems because Abraham and his wife Sarah they had to wait 25 years before their only son Isaac was born but in that time if you know the story Abraham he took things into his own hands in order to try and hurry God's timing but as you know you can't hurry God Isaac, Abraham's son he also had his own problems because his father attempted to sacrifice him on Mount Moriah he also was a single man for many years and he needed a wife and he eventually found Rebecca and when he finally had children at the age of 60 he had twin sons who grew up hating one another the promise always had encountered problems and the problems of Jacob and Esau they were these twins who for many years they were enemies because Esau sold his birthright for a pot of stew and Jacob stole the birthright from Esau by impersonating his twin brother but you know it was receiving through receiving that birthright that Jacob experienced blessing from God and he was renamed Israel and where Joseph fits into the narrative of Genesis and this story of family is that he was one of the children of Israel

[9 : 45] Joseph was the 11th son of Israel but you know what we see is that throughout the generations from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob and now to the 12 sons of Israel throughout all these generations God's covenant promise to Abraham still stood God had said I'm going to give you a family I'm going to make you a family nation and through your family all the nations in this world are going to experience blessing and it's because of that promise of blessing to the world that we experience that blessing and you know that's what we were singing about in Psalm 105 we were singing about the Lord the one who keeps covenant and how he has kept his covenant promise with Abraham and he has kept that promise to a thousand generations how the Lord is he is a covenant making and a covenant keeping God and you know like Abraham and all his family we are able to experience and enjoy and even enter into that covenant promise of blessing we're able to enter in by faith in the covenant king

Jesus Christ my friend this covenant promise is a family promise it's a promise to us and to our children it's a promise for every generation that we will experience the blessing of God upon our homes and upon our families when we enter into this covenant by faith in the covenant king Jesus Christ and you know as parents and as grandparents I'm sure that we want nothing more than for our children and our grandchildren to experience the blessing of God in their lives there's nothing else we want for them you know that's why we baptise our children because we want nothing more than for the generation coming after us and even the generations yet unborn that they too would praise and magnify the Lord and you know today even though this covenant promise was made thousands of years ago in a different context and part of a different culture and even though we might be as far away from the promised land of Israel as geographically possible and yet my friend this promise still stands this promise still stands and we can be part of the promised blessing of God we can be part of this great family by faith in the promised son

Jesus Christ but you know when we read through this book of beginnings what we have to realise is that out of all that was going on in the history of this world out of all the drama and all the discoveries that were taking place God was focused and fixated on this family and God was interested in this family and what they were going through and God was interested in them because they were the seed of the woman yes they were from the line and lineage of Abraham but they were also from the line and lineage of Adam they were part of the bigger picture of God's perfect plan and path and purposes and promise they were part of this was part of the bigger picture because God promised way back in Genesis chapter 3 at verse 15 a key verse in the Bible God promised that the seed of the woman would come and crush the head of the serpent the seed of the woman will come and crush the head of the serpent and that's what's alluded to in verse 2 with that phrase these are the generations these are the generations now it's an interesting phrase because it's actually used throughout this book of beginnings in order to begin a new section in the story because we read in Genesis chapter 2 these are the generations of the heavens and the earth and then as you go through the subsequent chapters you read these are the generations of Adam these are the generations of Noah of Shem of Terah of Abraham of Isaac and then now we read in verse 2 these are the generations of Jacob and you know what we've been reminded with each and every one of these statements is that God was interested in this family

God was interested in this lineage God was interested in what was going to happen to this family because they were from the line and lineage of the woman they were from the seed of the woman who would come and crush the head of the serpent but you know what's really fascinating about the Bible is that this phrase these are the generations it doesn't appear again in the Bible until we come into the New Testament where Matthew opens his gospel with the words the book of the generation of Jesus Christ the son of David the son of Abraham and you know what Matthew is telling us there is that Jesus is the promised seed of Genesis 3.15 Jesus is the seed of the woman who came to crush the head of Satan Jesus is part of this covenant promise Jesus is part of this gospel story Jesus is part of this redemption narrative

Jesus is part of this family story he's part of this wonderful family and this covenant promise and you know my friend as we begin this study of Joseph in the book of beginnings I'd encourage you to read through Genesis read through this book of beginnings because the story of Joseph is a story of family the story of Joseph is a story of family but secondly we see that the story of Joseph is a story of favoritism it's a story of family and a story of favoritism a story of favoritism we read in verse 3 now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his sons because he was the son of his old age and he made him a robe of many colors but when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him as we said

[16 : 43] God's covenant promise to this family was not without its problems and we certainly see that in this story because even though the story of Joseph is a story of family it's the story of a dysfunctional family because contrary to God's institution of marriage in Genesis 2 where you would have one husband and one wife in this family there was one father and four mothers there were two wives who were two sisters Rachel and Leah but there was also two concubines called Bilhah and Zilpah and they all had children which means that there were twelve boys in the family and one girl and in the order of their birth there was Reuben Simeon Levi Judah Dan Naphtali Gad Asher Issachar Zebulun Dinah who was the daughter and then

Joseph and Benjamin and as you can imagine in a household with so many wives and concubines and so many children as you can imagine emotions often run high there was lots of tension lots of rivalries jealousy there was conflict there was stresses and strains and this not only affected the parents it also affected the children it was a dysfunctional family it wasn't the norm it wasn't the God ordained family home of dad mum and kids it was a lot more complicated and complex than that and yet as we said earlier God was interested in this family God was interested in this family and you know I want to say to you this morning my friend God is interested in your family God is interested in your family because the covenant promise is a family promise it's a promise of blessing to families and it's a promise of blessing for all the families in the world who look to the Lord by faith and obedience and you know the thing is there's actually no such thing as a normal family because every family is in many ways a dysfunctional family because every family has flaws every family has failings and fallouts every family is different because there are families which experience breakups and breakdowns there are families which experience sickness and suffering and sorrow there are families with division and divorce there are single parent families there are young families there are adopted families there are amalgamated families there are even some families in our nation today who have two dads and two moms and yes it's sinful but my friend they're still savable they're still savable because the glory of the gospel is that

God graciously comes to us and says to us I'm interested in your family I'm interested in your family my friend there's no perfect family not even the family of God is perfect you know more often than not the church is a dysfunctional family but the gospel says to us God is interested in your family God is interested in your family and God was interested in this family but in this family there was favoritism in this family there was favoritism because Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons because he was the son of his old age and he made him a robe of many colors and when his brothers saw that the father loved him more than all his brothers they hated him and they couldn't speak peacefully to him they couldn't say shalom to him and you know as a father it's quite a sad statement to read that Jacob loved Joseph more than all his sons because as parents there should never be favoritism within a family there should never be a popular or a prevalent or a predominant child in the family as parents we should never show parental partiality because it only leads to distinction and discrimination and even division and we can show favoritism we can do it very subtly by spending time with one child more than another or showing less discipline to that favored child more than the others or we can even give them privileges to this favored child more than the others but whether they're children or even adults growing up there should never be parental partiality there should never be parental partiality because of their age or their gender or their education or their manner or their abilities or even their sexuality or their income or even if they're not saved you know all our children in our family home and even in the family of

God they should all be loved and looked after evenly and equally and there's no denying that that's hard to do but that's the directive and demonstration we're given in scripture because as God's children God looks after us and loves us evenly and equally but you know you would have expected more from Jacob than to have a family favourite not only because Jacob was someone who knew the Lord and was part of this covenant promise and part of this family covenant but you know Jacob had seen and experienced what family favouritism can do when Jacob was a young man Jacob's father Isaac he favoured Jacob's brother Esau Jacob's mother Rebecca she favoured Jacob and because of this family favouritism it led to feuds and fighting and fallout within the family but you know

Jacob he not only experienced family favouritism as a young man he also experienced it in his marriage because when Jacob finally got married after seven years of waiting for a wife Jacob was tricked into marrying Rachel's sister Leah but Jacob he always loved Rachel he always favoured Rachel and he waited another seven years to marry Rachel you'll be glad to know that I have no experience of this but I would assume that having two wives would also create feuds and fighting and fallout within the family even more so because they were sisters but Leah was always second best she wasn't first like Rachel she wasn't foremost like Rachel she wasn't she wasn't favoured like Rachel because Jacob loved Rachel and that's probably why Jacob favoured Joseph because Joseph was Rachel's firstborn son you know

[24 : 03] Leah had given Jacob six sons but Jacob favoured Rachel's firstborn son Joseph but you'd expect more from Jacob wouldn't you you'd expect more from him than to have a family favourite after all that he experienced he's the one who should have known the discouragement and even the damage it would cause to his family by favouring Joseph Jacob should have learned from his upbringing Jacob should have learned from his past he should have learned from history that family favouritism it always ends in fallout you know as Prime Minister Winston Churchill he said in a speech to the House of Commons after the Second World War he said those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it and that can certainly be applied to us but particularly to Jacob because by failing to learn from his own history history was repeating itself and Jacob was condemning himself by favouring

Joseph and yet Joseph he wasn't the first born in the family Reuben was Joseph was the eleventh born Joseph was the eleventh son but Jacob treated Joseph as if he was the first born son by favouring him and giving to him that famous coat of many colours now it's not clear that Joseph's coat of many colours was actually a multi-coloured coat the literal translation it certainly wasn't a high-vis jacket either but you know the literal translation of the phrase coat of many colours it literally means a royal tunic a royal tunic which highlights that Joseph's coat may not have been multi-coloured but it was certainly of royal colours the colours of blue and purple and gold and it was a long tunic as we said to the children it had sleeves right down to the wrist and it stretched the coat stretched all the way down to the ankles it was a garment of a sovereign not the garment of a shepherd and by giving this coat of many colours to

Joseph Jacob was not only favouring Joseph and saying that he loved Joseph more than all of his other sons you know he was saying more than that Jacob was letting all the members of the family know all his wives know that Joseph was Jacob's chosen heir and as you'd expect Joseph's brothers hated him for it they hated him for it but the story of Joseph is not just a story of favouritism it's also a story of faithfulness it's a story of faithfulness which is what I'd like us to consider lastly so the story of Joseph is a story of family a story of favouritism and a story of faithfulness a story of faithfulness we read in verse four but when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers they hated him and could not speak peacefully

Joseph had a dream and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more you know these verses verses four and five they repeatedly emphasise to us just how much Joseph's brothers hated him and to be fair to them you can understand why because Joseph he was one of the youngest sons he was one of Jacob's youngest sons he was only seventeen he had no life experience he didn't really have any cares or commitments or concerns and yet he was the favourite son he was the golden boy he was the heir of the father's inheritance but you know what really annoyed and angered Joseph's brothers was that Joseph was a grass Joseph was a clipe Joseph was a telltale and no one likes a telltale because it seems that at any given opportunity Joseph would just run off to daddy with the slightest problem and he would tell him everything that his brothers were getting up to and you know that's often what it's like in our house

I don't know what it's like in your house but the boys in our house they're always telling tales on each other they're always shouting I'm telling I'm telling I'm telling but it only makes the other ones annoyed and angry but you know what annoyed and angered Joseph's brothers even more was that Joseph came to them and he came to them in many ways like the words of in the words of Martin Luther King he said I have I've had a dream I've had a dream and you know you can almost imagine the scene can't you where early one morning Joseph's elder brothers they'd all been up early and they were all sitting at the kitchen table and they're all eating their breakfast they're all trying to rush through their breakfast and get out the door and tend to the sheep and then Joseph he just casually walks in still in his pajamas and he makes this announcement to the whole family and in the presence of his father Jacob and

[29 : 41] Jacob's four wives and his eleven sons and his one daughter Joseph announces to them and he says in verse six hear this dream that I have dreamed behold we were binding sheaves in the field and behold my sheaf arose and stood upright and behold your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf but you know what's more is that it happened again the following morning Joseph came down to breakfast and he said in verse nine then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said behold I have dreamed another dream behold the sun the moon and the eleven stars were bowing down to me and were told his brothers said to him are you indeed to reign over us are you indeed to rule over us so they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words you know Joseph's brothers they probably thought that

Joseph was already a bit of a dreamer but this just took the biscuit this this was the straw that broke the camel's back and Joseph's announcement it only heightened the annoyance and anger of Joseph's brothers because Joseph he to them he came across as arrogant and big headed but you know my friend what Joseph lacked at this point was character what Joseph lacked was character yes Joseph was a good boy yes he was the golden boy he was the blue-eyed boy but he was still a boy he was only 17 he was young he was immature and he was miles away from having character but the thing is God was beginning a good work in the life of Joseph and God was going to use Joseph's experience God was going to use Joseph's years to give him character character and you know it's the apostle Paul who reminds us in

Romans 5 he reminds us how God gives us character how does God give us character my friend Paul says we rejoice in our sufferings knowing that suffering produces patience and patience produces character and character produces hope hope and hope does not put us to shame because the love of God has been poured into our heart by the Holy Spirit you know God works character into our lives he faithfully works character and that's what the story of Joseph is all about it's a story of faithfulness not Joseph's faithfulness or even Jacob's faithfulness but God's faithfulness because in the story of Joseph God is faithful to his covenant God is faithful to his gospel promise God is faithful to his word and the thing is God had spoken to this dysfunctional family he had spoken to them through Joseph's dreams and we know that God had spoken because Joseph had two dreams with the same emphasis and these two dreams were the two witnesses to the truth of God's word they were two two dreams were two witnesses to the truth of God's word now of course

God can communicate his truth to us through dreams or visions or prophecy but that's not the primary means of communication now as the writer to the Hebrews affirms to us in the New Testament in these last days which is now in these last days God has spoken to us through his word his son the Lord Jesus Christ and you know someone once said if you want to hear God speak read your Bible and if you want to hear God speak audibly then read your Bible out loud because God has spoken my friend he has spoken through his word and God is speaking this morning God is speaking this morning through his word his word in scripture and his word that is the saviour Jesus Christ and the thing is we're to trust

God's word we're to take God at his word because God is faithful to his word he's faithful to his promises and that's what the story of Joseph is all about it's all about God being faithful to his promises and to his people the story of Joseph my friend it's a story of family it's a story of favouritism but it's also a story of faithfulness it's a story of faithfulness the story of Joseph as you know it's history it's his story it's a story of God's faithfulness because the main character in the story of Joseph isn't Joseph the main character in the story of Joseph is Jesus because Jesus is on every page Jesus is on every page and that's why this is the greatest story ever told because Jesus he's the one who writes the story of our lives he's the author of the story he's the director in the drama and like Joseph we might not understand the storyline we might not foresee the twists and the turns in the story of our lives but he's the one who turns the pages

[35 : 41] Jesus is there on every page and you know that's what William Cowper came to discover and I hope and pray that that's what we'll come to discover too as we study the life of Joseph together I hope and pray that we'll come to discover that God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform he plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm this is the story of Joseph but it's also the story of Jesus it's the greatest story ever told well may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray together our father in heaven we give thanks to thee that thou art faithful to thy promises that these promises that they have stood to a thousand generations and they will stand until the end of time we thank thee Lord that they are like thee a God who never is the story that we might not know we thank thee that despite everything that thou art the one who knows the story thou art the one who has seen the end from the beginning and help us then as we go into a new week to trust thee to lean upon thee and to look to thee go before us then we pray keep us we ask for we ask it in Jesus name and for his sake amen we we're we're we're we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning by singing to God's praise in Psalm 89

Psalm 89 in the Scottish Psalter and we're singing from the beginning and Psalm 89 it's a psalm as you know it's a psalm that encourages us and exhorts us to sing of God's mercies and to praise God for his covenant faithfulness my friend we worship a faithful God and that whatever you're going through this morning he is faithful he will not change and your song today your song today should be Psalm 89 God's mercies I will ever sing and with my mouth I shall thy faithfulness make to be known to generations all so we'll sing Psalm 89 to God's praise God that we never sing and with my heart

I shall thy faithfulness make to be known to generations all for mercy shall be built said I forever to endure thy faithfulness in the hands thou wilt establish sure I with my chosen one have made a crown and gracious thee and to my servant to my love to earth give this form of mine that

I see this salvation forever to remain and will to generations of thy throne build and maintain the praises of thy wonders wonders Lord the heavens shall express and in the congregation of saints thy faithfulness change thy faithfulness for to do to the people who will be to the people who have to help them to the people who have them to the people who